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STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN REDUCING SPEAKING ANXIETY

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Abstract

This study is conducted with the aim to seek out what the students have done to reduce their speaking anxiety in the classrooms. Data collection was done by conducting semi-structured interview with nine students that had the highest rank of anxiety in the classrooms. The findings revealed that avoiding eye contact with the classmates and teacher, and doing physical expressive reactions were the most frequent non-verbal strategies and activities done by the students in reducing their anxiety when speaking English in the classrooms. The study suggests that English teachers should be more sensitive and concerned with the anxiety faced by the students when speaking English in the classrooms.

Keywords: *Speaking, anxiety, EFL students, classroom.*

INTRODUCTION

English is still a frightening specter for many Indonesian students. This is due to English in Indonesia being a foreign language (EFL) that is taught and used only in certain places, such as schools and additional courses. English is used only in the classroom, as one of the subjects in schools. English tends not to have an important role in social and national life of a country that considers English as only a foreign language that is taught in schools as one of the subjects (Broughton *et al.*, 1980). Because the context of English in Indonesia is only as a foreign language, many students are not accustomed to using the English language when communicating in English class. This results in anxiety, and this anxiety prevents the EFL learners from mastering English in oral communication. That is, anxiety is one of the factors that hinder and prevent the students to achieve success in EFL classrooms (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

A lot of factors may cause students to feel anxious about expressing their ideas by using English in front of the class. Students feel insecure, anxious to make mistakes when talking, worry about the ridicule of peers and, the pressure from teachers who want their students to be always active. Other factors include inefficient allocation of time, as well as materials and inputs that are not appropriate (Tsui, 1996, as cited by Nunan, 1999, p. 233). In addition, interaction between teachers, interlocutors, and peers can also affect the construction of social anxiety (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

Sari (2016) conducted a study at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh to investigate English speaking anxiety factors in EFL classrooms and found that students in that school experienced some anxiety factors in speaking English. 71% of students experienced communication apprehension factors, 53% experienced fear of negative evaluation, 48% had test anxiety, and 39% experienced anxiety related to English class factors. In short, the findings showed that students at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh experienced a range of anxiety when speaking English.

Based on the findings revealed by Sari (2016) above, the researcher is interested to continue the study with the aim to find out what the students have done so far to reduce their speaking anxiety in the classrooms.

Research Problem

What have the EFL students at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh done so far to reduce their speaking anxiety?

Research Objective

To find out what the students at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh have done to reduce their speaking anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety

Anxiety is the feeling of an individual who feels uncomfortable, insecure, anxious, nervous, uneasy, in danger, in doubt, depressed and/or intimidated by the circumstances surrounding her or him. Anxiety is also a natural feeling and experienced by everyone when they feel under pressure and stress (Mandel, 2000). Spielberger (1983), as cited in Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, (1986) correlate the anxiety with tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system.

Furthermore, someone who is experiencing anxiety may have uncomfortable internal symptoms, such as nervousness, abdominal pain and sweating, trembling hands and feet, breathing more quickly, as well as faster heartbeat or palpitations (Mandel, 2000). The impact of anxiety is to disturb any activities being conducted by the sufferer. Someone who is experiencing mental symptoms will struggle to follow the lesson because the sufferer finds it difficult to think clearly and rationally (Mayer, 2008). High anxiety is very detrimental for students in learning English because it can cause disturbances in the absorption of new languages (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In sum, anxiety is may have a significant effect on students when learning a foreign language.

A delay in the absorption of information greatly affects the student's competence and performance in English speaking. Anxiety affects the sufferer's performance, and their ability to learn becomes decreased, which means their effort will not match their ability. Occasionally, excessive anxiety may make someone become powerless to do anything. This, anxiety may seem crippling to someone from his or her own perspective. Internally, the feeling of anxiety cannot be separated from the emotions experienced by the sufferer. Emotional feelings inside the sufferer may be described as being "overwhelmed and out of control, helpless, hopeless, and wanting to flee the situation, irritable and angry embarrassed and ashamed" (Mayer, 2008, p. 14).

Research Methodology

The design of this study was qualitative. Nine second grade students at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh with the highest rank of speaking anxiety were participants in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in getting the data in the field (see Appendix 1 for the list of questions used by the researcher to interview the interviewees). In analyzing the data from interviews, the researcher transcribed all the recording results and analyzed them by using the sequenced process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and/or verification, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). In data reduction, the researcher extracted all the essence of the interviews collected. Researcher discarded the unimportant contents of the interview, separating them with the essentials only. All the steps that the researcher done in data reduction were related with Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 11) statement by saying data reduction is the "sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified".

After reducing the data from interviews, the researcher displays the data reduction results in tabular form (see Appendix 2) with the aim to categorize each activity and strategy undertaken by the participants in reducing their speaking anxiety in the classroom. Data display is a collection of organized and pressed information to be deduced, displayed and actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, in the conclusion and/or verification, data that had been presented in table should be

described in detail. Furthermore, the researcher also verified the data obtained from data display to ensure that data in conclusion is reliable.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results obtain from the interviews reveal that to reduce speaking anxiety when speaking English, students at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh use the following strategies.

Keeping silent and making negotiation

The students will pretend to be silent when the teacher asks them to talk. When they see the teacher has been getting angry, then they will talk. Before beginning to speak English in the classroom, the students will express their shortcomings to the teacher by pretending not to understand and/or feigning illness. It is done in order to anticipate the errors and mistakes they make when talking, so that the teacher can understand their shortcomings.

Carrying small note, memorizing and repeating

Some students revealed that carrying a little note when speaking English can make them feel less anxious to speak English in the classroom. They do it by writing the answers or pointing to be talked about on paper or on their hand. Then, they will read the little note quietly. They also repeat and remember the material to be conveyed before performing it in the classroom.

Positive thinking and ignoring friends

One of the things which the students do to reduce their speaking anxiety is to be positive-minded to whatever will happen to them when talking later. They also ignore their friends' mockery by smiling despite of any taunts. This means that they are dare to take risks and continue to speak despite the derision of friends. They consider if that all students are the same and they also assume that none of their friends hear them when talking, and consider that providing the wrong answers is normal.

Avoiding eye contact

The students do not see face to face directly with their classmates and teacher when speaking English and this is done to reduce their speaking anxiety. Some students choose to cover their face with their hands when talking. They will pretend that there is no one else in the class when speaking English in the classroom.

Smiling and making jokes

These students conveyed that when a quiet and silent classroom situation occurred, it made them feel anxious to speak English. They are anxious to be the center of attention, with a dozen pairs of eyes staring at them. Then, to reduce their speaking anxiety, many students try to smile when talking and making jokes to break the quiet atmosphere in the classroom, so that they can speak with less anxiety.

Sharing and asking for friend's help

Because of the high anxiety experienced when speaking English, some students choose to share beforehand with their seatmate or other friends about the answers or opinions that will be conveyed in the classroom. Whether the opinions or points they will convey are correct or incorrect is less important. Besides sharing with friends, some students also rely on their seatmates to help them when speaking in front of the class. Generally, these students will have suffered high anxiety when speaking in front of the class and this leads them to forget the things they already know. Then, to reduce their anxiety, commonly, these students will look to their seatmates in order to be informed of the speaking points that may be forgotten while speaking English. This may include looking for non-verbal signals from their seatmates, such as looking at their facial expressions.

Physical expressive reactions

There are some students who busied themselves by doing apparently unimportant physical things to reduce their anxiety in speaking English. The unusual behaviors, such as nail and lip biting,

shaking the body, doodling in books, fixing their veil, rolling the tip of their veil, tidying their uniform, laughing, stomping, shaking hands, holding hands and snapping their fingers, beating table and chair, and walking around the classroom are called physical expressive reactions. The students engage in these reactions to reduce their anxiety when speaking English in the classroom.

Drinking and praying before talking

A number of students claim that when speaking English in the classroom, they experienced some physical disorders; such as trembling, heart pounding feeling, and excessive nervousness. Then, to reduce this anxiety, students may recite prayers and drink water before they speak English. They believe by drinking water, they will be more relaxed and calm. It makes the students' anxiety decreased.

Code mixing

Students mix English with Indonesian as a way to reduce their speaking anxiety. Sometimes, mixing the language when talking is done with the aim to avoid being silent when not know some vocabulary.

Volume setting

Adjusting the volume of their voice to reduce speaking anxiety in the classroom was done by the students. They choose to speak silently with the aim to save them when making mistakes. By speaking silently, their friends and teacher will not hear clearly the mistakes they make.

From the number of strategies listed above, avoiding eye contact and engaging in physical expressive reactions were the most frequent activities done by the students to reduce their anxiety when talking. Gregersen (2005) proposed that students who have very high anxiety in English foreign language will tend to reduce or even avoid eye contact directly with their teacher. Students worry that if they look at the teacher when talking; everything they are thinking will disappear from their mind and their concentration will be disrupted too. Psychologically, someone who feels anxiety likely will not look into the eyes of others directly to avoid the anxiety they are facing (Schneier, *et al.*, 2011; Wieser, *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, in reducing speaking anxiety, many of the students engage in physical expressive reactions when speaking English. These actions they do, either intentionally or unintentionally, appear as a result of the anxiety they experienced. Physical expressive reactions are non-verbal communication responses of the student when experiencing fear in speaking English (Zhiping, 2013). The function of this non-verbal communication is to suppress the anxiety they face when talking in English. Hence, to reduce their anxiety, the students engage in this non-verbal communication.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings above can be concluded that although students at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh experience anxiety in speaking English in the classroom, the anxiety does not completely paralyze them when speaking English in the classrooms. The anxiety that they face cannot simply be eliminated overall, but it still can be reduced, as done by the students at SMA Negeri 5 Banda Aceh. They reduce their speaking anxiety through a variety of strategies and unique ways. I believe that they do this with the intention that the anxiety they feel should not prevent them from achieving success in learning English speaking skills.

In reducing the anxiety faced by students when speaking English in the classrooms, the roles of teachers may be important. Therefore, teachers may be able to reduce students speaking anxiety by being more sensitive and caring to the anxiety experienced by the students when speaking English. By making a few jokes and laughing together with the students, they may dilute the tense atmosphere, so that students become relaxed again and the anxiety they suffered can be reduced. Furthermore, teachers should try to communicate as well as possible with the students. It means that, teachers should avoid harsh or rude language that could embarrass students and make the students' self-esteem fall in front of their classmates.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview questions (adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) and Yahya (2013)):

1. What do you do so far to reduce your panic when you have to speak without preparation in English class?
2. What do you do so far to reduce your shyness when speaking English in front of other students?
3. What do you do so far to reduce your anxiety when you express your opinion in front of your classmates?
4. What do you do so far to reduce your nervous feeling so that you do not forget things you really know while speaking English?
5. What do you do so far to reduce your feeling like the following statement, "even if I know the answer; I can't express myself in the English class"?
6. What do you do so far to reduce your trembling and heart pounding when you know that you are going to be asked to speak in English class?
7. What do you do so far to reduce your unconfident feeling to speak English in the class?

APPENDIX 2

The data reduction results in tabular form.

No	strategies	Activities
1	Keeping silent and making negotiation	Pretending to be silent Pretending not to understand Feigning illness

Appendix 2 continued...

2	Carrying small notes, memorizing and repeating	Writing the answers or points on paper Writing the answers or points on the hand Carrying and reading the little note quietly Repeating the material to be conveyed Remembering the material to be conveyed
3	Positive thinking and ignoring friends	Believing in our own answers Smiling with all the taunts Daring to take risks Continuing to speak even though in the derision of friends Considering that all students are the same Assuming no friends who hear us when talking Considering that the wrong answers was normal
4	Avoiding eye contact	Do not see the teacher and classmates faces Covering face by hands when talking pretending if there is no one the class
5	Smiling and making jokes	Talking, punctuated by laughing Smiling when talking Making jokes before talking
6	Sharing and asking friend's help	Confirming the correctness of the answer / points that will be conveyed to a friend Looking at friend's face to ask for the code when speaking English
7	Physical expressive reactions	Nail and lip biting Shaking the body Doodling in books Fixing their veil Rolling the tip of their veil Tidying their uniform Stomping Shaking hands, laughing Snapping their fingers Beating table and chair Waling in the classroom
8	Drinking and praying	Drinking white water Reciting <i>Astaghfirullah</i> Reciting <i>Basmillah</i>
9	Code mixing	Mixing English with Indonesian
10	Volume setting	Turning down the volume as small as possible